



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Online Harms

col 158WH Damian Hinds (Conservative): ... many of the things that must be done probably cannot be legislated for anyway. Additionally, technology evolves. A decade ago, legislators were not talking about the effect of livestreaming on child abuse. We certainly were not talking about the use of emojis in racist abuse. ... Who knows, in five or 10 years' time, what the equivalent subjects will be? ...

col 159WH ... That brings me to my central point about the hardest part of this Bill: the so-called legal but harmful harms. I suggest that we actually call them "harmful but legal", because that better captures their essence ... It is a natural reaction when hearing about the Online Safety Bill, which will deal with stuff that is legal, to say, "Well, why is there a proposed law going through the British Parliament that tries to deal with things that are, and will stay, legal? We have laws to give extra protection to children, but adults should be able to make their own choices. If you start to interfere with that, you risk fundamental liberties, including freedom of speech." I agree with that natural reaction, but I suggest that we have to consider a couple of additional factors.

First, there is no hard line between adults and children in this context. ...

col 160WH ... The second additional factor ... is that in this context there is not a hard line between what is legal and what is not. I mentioned emoji abuse. ... I suggest it will be very hard to legislate for what constitutes emoji abuse in racism. ...

col 161WH ... when people talk about free speech ... they normally mean expressing a view or being robust in argument.

We have the most oppositional, confrontational parliamentary democracy in the world, and we are proud of our ability to do better, to make better law and hold people to account through that process, but that is not the same thing as we are talking about here. Moreover, there is a misconception that the Bill would ban those things; in fact, the Bill states only that a service must have a policy about how it deals with them. ...

col 163WH Caroline Dinenage (Conservative): ... Of course, the priorities of the Bill must be to protect children, to tackle serious harm, to root out illegal content and to ensure that online platforms are doing what they say they are doing in enforcing their own terms and

conditions. Contrary to the lazy accusations, largely by those who have not taken the time to read this hefty piece of legislation, the Bill does not set out to restrict free speech, to protect the feelings of adult users or to somehow legislate for people's right not to be offended.

Following on from other Members, I will talk about the legal but harmful issue. There is no easy way to define "legal but harmful", because it is so opaque. ...

col 164WH If Molly Russell's tragic case teaches us anything, it is that dreadful, harmful online content cannot be defined simply by what is strictly legal or illegal, because algorithms do not differentiate between harmless and harmful content. They see a pattern and they exploit it. They are, quite simply, echo chambers. They take our fears and our paranoia, and surround us with unhealthy voices that simply reinforce them, however dangerous or hateful they are. Fundamentally, they breadcrumb users into more content, slowly, piece by piece, cultivating an interest. They take us down a path we might not otherwise have followed—one that is seemingly harmless at the start, but that eventually is anything but.

We have a moral duty to keep children safe on online platforms, but we also have a moral duty to keep other users safe. ...

... perversely, not putting in place protections would be inherently more of a bar to freedom of speech, because users' content can be taken down at the moment with random unpredictability and without any justification or redress. Others are afraid to speak up, fearing pile-on harassment and intimidation from anonymous accounts. ...

col 165WH **Siobhan Baillie (Conservative):** ... The ability to operate anonymous accounts is abused on a huge scale and is fuelling racist, antisemitic and sexist abuse, pictures of people's genitalia being sent around, name calling, bullying, online fraud, misinformation, scams, and the evasion of the law. It is much scarier to receive such abuse when people do not know who is sending it. ...

col 166WH It is not rocket science to understand how the online disinhibition effect makes anonymous users feel less accountable and less responsible for their actions. ... I urge the Minister to look again at the work of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, which is a doughty champion on this issue. We know that our Jewish communities have suffered dreadfully, with increased abuse and threats in recent years. ...

col 171WH **Kirsty Blackman (SNP):** ... The First Minister of Scotland went to visit the [St Albert's Primary School] on 30 September to celebrate the work that it was doing on tackling climate change. As a result, the school was subject to horrific racist abuse. Thousands of racist messages were sent to St Albert's Primary. I want to highlight that, because it is one of the reasons that we need this legislation. That abuse was aimed specifically at children and was genuinely horrific. ...

col 173WH **Alex Davies-Jones (Labour):** ... Enough is enough. Children and adults—all of us—need to be kept safe online. ... There is broad consensus that social media companies have failed to regulate themselves. ...

col 174WH Freedom of speech is vital to our democracy, but it absolutely must not come at a harmful cost. The Bill Committee, which I was a member of, heard multiple examples of racist, antisemitic, extremist and other harmful publishers, from holocaust deniers to white supremacists, which would stand to benefit from the recognised news publisher exemption as it currently stands, either overnight or by making minor administrative changes. ...

col 175WH There are genuine issues with the Government's approach to the so-called legal but harmful provisions in the Bill that will, in essence, fail to capture some of the most harmful content out there. ...

col 176WH **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Damian Collins):** ... When online safety issues are raised with social media companies, they say things like, "We make this stuff very hard to find." The lived experience

of most teenagers is not searching for such material; it is such material being selected by the platforms and targeted at the user. ... If platforms choose to recommend content to users to increase their engagement with the platform, they make a business decision. They are selecting content that they think will make a user want to return more frequently and stay on the platform for longer. ...

col 177WH ... at times, the platforms are not effective enough at recognising the kinds of engagement tools they are using, the content that is used to engage people and the harm that that can do. For a vulnerable person, the sad truth is that their vulnerability will probably be detected by the AI that drives the recommendation tools. That person is far more likely to be exposed to content that will make their vulnerabilities worse. ...

col 179WH ... All platforms, regardless of size, have to meet the illegal priority harm standard. For the worst offences, they will already have to produce risk assessments and respond to Ofcom's request for information. Given that, I would suspect that, if Ofcom had a suspicion that serious illegal activity, or other activity that was causing serious concern, was taking place on a smaller platform, it would have powers to investigate and would probably find that the platform was in breach of those responsibilities. It is not the case that if a company is not a category 1 company, it is not held to account under the illegal priority harms clauses of the Bill. ...

col 180WH **Damian Collins:** ... we have many offences where there is already a legal threshold, and we want them to be included in the regulatory systems. For online safety standards, it is important that the minimum thresholds are based on our laws. In the debate on "legal but harmful", one of the key points to consider ... is what we base the thresholds on. To base them on the many offences that we already have written into law is, I think, a good starting point. We understand what those thresholds are. We understand what illegal activity is. We say to the platforms, "Your safety standards must, at a minimum, be at that level." ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-26/debates/D6154736-878A-4855-9457-531E291E72EC/OnlineHarms>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Hate Crime

Matt Western (Labour): What recent assessment has [the Minister] made of trends in the levels of police-recorded hate crimes targeting individuals on the basis of their (a) race, (b) religion, (c) sexual orientation, (d) disability and (e) transgender identity. (901837)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mims Davies): I greatly welcome the fact that people feel more willing to report hate crime. We have seen an increase of 26% in recorded incidents and believe that the biggest driver of it is the welcome improvement in police recording. Let me be clear: hate crime is a scourge on communities and will not be tolerated, which is why we are committed to reducing all crime, including hate incidents, and are on track to recruit 20,000 extra police officers.

Matt Western: According to the Office for National Statistics, nationally we have seen a sixfold increase in hate crime over the past decade. Locally, in the recent efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy inspections of Warwickshire police, criticism was made of the way in which the force supports victims in the aftermath of such crimes. This was felt by a constituent who was physically and racially assaulted; his assailant was charged with physical damage of a phone after Warwickshire police failed to complete a case action plan sent to them by the Crown Prosecution Service. Can the Minister advise us of how frequently she meets her colleagues in the Home Office? What is being done to arrest this rise in violent crime?

Mims Davies: As I hope the hon. Gentleman will see, I am personally committed to ensuring the best possible response to these terrible crimes and, indeed, to all crimes. There is an online hate crime hub, True Vision, which police can now directly work with; he mentions a constituent's case, and victims of online hate can submit reports and get the right support, which is equally important. That is there on both sides—it is for the police also. ...

Caroline Nokes: In his question, the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) did not include hate crimes committed against women, yet we know that the Nottinghamshire police force is doing some great pilot work on recording misogyny as a hate crime in the incidents it encounters. Will the Minister update us on how that pilot is going and whether there are plans to roll it out further? What progress is the Home Office making on its work and consultation on tackling public sexual harassment, which is one of those significant crimes that impacts women every day?

Mims Davies: My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I am very interested in both those issues. The consultation on public sexual harassment has been completed and I am currently looking at it. On misogyny as a hate crime, I am aware of the Nottinghamshire police work. It is absolutely right that a number of police forces are choosing of their own volition to record those particular crimes. I will update her further in writing, because there is more to say. ...

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op): ... With reference to the previous question, I should of course say that making misogyny a hate crime is something the Government have stood against until now, when they have been pushed by a Labour police and crime commissioner in Nottinghamshire, but we hope the tide may be turning.

A moment ago, the Minister referred to some statistics on hate crime, but not the most concerning ones. One was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) when he talked about violent hate crime, which is six times higher today than it was 10 years ago. Hate crimes that are reported are up by 269% in England and Wales since 2010. We have also seen the highest number of religiously motivated hate crimes ever recorded this year. What are the Government going to do about this?

Mims Davies: The hon. Lady knows that we have some of the strongest legislation to tackle everything that she has mentioned, including religious hate crime. Over the past six years, the Home Office's places of worship protective security funding scheme has awarded 323 grants of around £8 million with regard to religious hate crime. I will be clear: I am personally committed to the best possible response to hate crime by every force.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-26/debates/D93ADAB6-5322-420B-8AD1-8CE530AA2D1D/HateCrime>

The True Vision website, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.report-it.org.uk/>

Topical Questions: Women and Equalities

Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat): I recently met the chair of the Chesham mosque committee, who had been told that medical examiners in our area will be available only five days a week and not at the weekend. That will cause significant problems for our Muslim and other religious communities who bury their loved ones as soon as possible following a death. Will the Minister meet me and my constituent to find a way forward to ensure that the new system does not infringe the rights of religious communities?

Kemi Badenoch: I did not fully hear the question, but if the hon. Lady writes to me in more detail about what she requires, I will be able to follow up in better detail.

Information provided by the Minister will be included in a future issue of Political Affairs Digest

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-26/debates/AE123F8B-4279-4595-A046-6EB9F59E6E35/TopicalQuestions#contribution-6057A12F-4E75-4F4E-B4B0-DE519ED4DEA9>

House of Commons Written Answer

Medical Examiners

Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat) [901844] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Government has made an equalities impact assessment of its proposed introduction of the statutory medical examiner system from April 2023.

Caroline Johnson: In its assessment of the impact on equality of these measures, DHSC has concluded that the policy for death certification reform and the introduction of medical examiners should not lead to any unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation of any particular group defined by sex, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or disability.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-26/901844>

TOP

Israel

House of Lords Written Answer

Palestinians: Non-governmental Organisations

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2558] To ask His Majesty's Government which Palestinian registered non-governmental organisations they fund; and with which they have contact.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: UK aid provides humanitarian and development assistance to some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world. In doing so, we partner with a wide range of organisations who are best placed to deliver these much-needed services. Civil society organisations play an important role in upholding human rights and democracy, and they must be able to operate freely in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). More information about UK development programmes in the OPTs and our partners can be found on DevTracker.

<https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-1-300667/summary>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-10-12/hl2558>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Bill of Rights Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227>

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

**** Online Safety Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Notice of amendments

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0121/amend/onlinesafety_rm_rep_1027.pdf

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Schools Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

Scottish Parliament

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

Mapping Exercise - Youth Workers supporting young people facing racism & antisemitism in Scotland (closing date 14 November 2022)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Z5YX2C7>

TOP

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438